



The “Social-E” Component of the Medical History:

The “Social-E” approach to the social history component of medical history taking is a way to encourage clinicians to detect and consider biological, chemical, physical, and psychological factors in the environment as well as other environmental changes that could be affecting their patient’s health.

The process of assessing environmental health risk has a number of phases, starting with hazard identification (i.e., “What is the exposure?” and then proceeding to exposure assessment (i.e., “How much of the hazard is the patient exposed to?”) and then risk assessment based on the hazard and the exposure (i.e., “How much health risk does the patient have from this hazard?”).

Therefore, in the basic medical history, it is appropriate to focus on hazard identification through a short number of screening questions about health hazards in the patient’s environment. If any hazards are identified, more detailed questions can be asked about how much exposure, in order to arrive at an assessment of risk from a particular hazard.

Screening Questions for the Social-E History:

Home and Neighborhood:

- Are you aware of any hazardous exposures in your home or neighborhood such as air, water, or soil pollution, excess noise, excess heat, or ticks or mosquitoes?

Work/School/Hobbies:

- Tell me about your occupation and hobbies. Are you aware of any health hazards in your workplace/school/hobbies?

Animals:

- Do you have pets or any other contact with animals? Any pets or other animals sick?

Food:

- Are you worried about running out of food, the safety of your food, or access to food?

General:

- Do you think that anything in your environment is making you sick or interfering with sleep or other activities?
- Do you have worries about climate change or other environmental challenges?

References:

ATSDR Exposure History Form

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/exp/history/docs/CSEMEposHist-26-29.pdf>

Ten Tusscheri GW, Leusz MM, Kope J. Paediatric environmental health history taking: Why bother? Acta Paediatrica, 2006; 95 Suppl 453: 13_17